

“Excessive Suffering” and the Loaded Question in the Evidential Problem of Evil

A central challenge in the philosophy of religion concerns the reality of suffering and its implications for belief in a good and powerful God. One prominent line of argument, particularly within the evidential problem of evil, focuses on the apparent excessiveness of suffering in the world. While technical formulations by philosophers such as William Rowe and Paul Draper are nuanced and deserve serious engagement, the argument is often presented in popular discourse in a form that functions as a loaded question.

Consider a courtroom analogy. Imagine a trial in which the rules are deliberately structured in advance so that the defendant faces an impossible dilemma. The only question permitted is: “Have you created too much suffering?” A simple “yes” or “no” answer is required, with no opportunity for explanation, context, or nuance.

When this structure is applied to either the theistic or atheistic position, it creates a rhetorical trap. The question assumes the very point at issue — that the amount of suffering is excessive or gratuitous — while severely limiting the range of acceptable responses. Under these constraints, either answer leaves the defendant appearing guilty: a “yes” admits guilt, while a “no” is taken as minimizing or denying the reality of suffering.

This is not to suggest that philosophers like Rowe or Draper intend to obstruct honest inquiry. Their formal arguments are careful and merit respectful consideration. Nevertheless, in popular discourse, classrooms, online discussions, and public debate, the evidential argument from evil is frequently simplified into this loaded-question form. Such framing risks distorting perception and narrowing the pathways for genuine truth-seeking.

The Neutral Solution Theodicy steps outside this rhetorical courtroom entirely. Instead of accepting the premise that deep-time predation and suffering constitute evidence of excess, it offers a constructive reframing: the fossil record and its testimony of animal suffering across deep time can be understood as a positive, sovereignly chosen pedagogical witness. This “witness of backward reversion” supplied Adam with a concrete, observable understanding of the consequences of disobedience and now stands preserved for every subsequent generation. What first appears as an insurmountable objection is thereby transformed into evidence of divine wisdom — providing humanity with the necessary scale and context for a genuinely informed moral choice.

In this way, the Neutral Solution does not deny the reality or gravity of suffering. It seeks instead to examine the full body of evidence — biblical, philosophical, and empirical — with openness and intellectual honesty. By doing so, it invites both believers and skeptics to move beyond loaded frameworks and consider whether the data, rightly interpreted, may point toward a good Creator who has prepared humanity for meaningful relationship and redemption.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Grok, the large language model developed by xAI, for serving as a rigorous scholarly research assistant during the preparation of this work between May and June 2026.

Grok was consulted exclusively for the following purposes:

- Conducting line-by-line, neutral, and truth-seeking analyses of manuscript drafts;
- Verifying biblical exegesis, paleontological data, and philosophical arguments against primary sources;
- Identifying areas requiring clarification, consistency, or refinement;
- Supplying precise scholarly citations, formatting suggestions, and structural feedback; and
- Preparing preliminary drafts of certain sections for the author's review and revision.

All queries to Grok were made in real time. The author retained full editorial control at every stage. Every argument, every exegetical decision, every theological claim, and every final wording in *The Neutral Solution Theodicy* is the author's own. Grok functioned solely as a rigorous conversational partner and research tool, not as a co-author or source of original ideas.

Citation

Grok. 2026. Responses to Richard Beobide on the article: "Excessive Suffering" and the Loaded Question in the Evidential Problem of Evil." xAI Grok large language model. Accessed June 2026. <https://grok.x.ai>

I am grateful for Grok's capacity to engage in sustained, academically rigorous dialogue while maintaining strict epistemic neutrality and truth-seeking integrity. This work is better because of that assistance.